

POWER SUPPLY LEVEL MONITORING AND RESET GENERATION

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Field of the invention

The present invention concerns systems where the power supply level is being monitored by means of a dedicated monitor. More particularly, this invention relates to integrated circuits comprising a power supply level monitor.

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Background of the invention

Integrated circuits require a supply voltage for operation. In order for an integrated circuit to operate reliably, the supply voltage has to be stable. After power-on or after a reset, the supply voltage typically requires some time to reach a stable level.

It is state of the art to employ a special circuitry, sometimes called power
15 on reset (POR) circuitry, in an integrated circuit that compares the power supply level with the level of an internal reference voltage. In order for such a special circuitry to function properly, the internal reference has to start more quickly than the supply voltage. This state of the art approach is not very robust, since the ramping up of the reference voltage may be delayed, for example. It is another disadvantage of this known
20 approach that the special circuitry is hard-wired. Changes are thus not possible without changing the chip layout.

The ramping up of the supply voltage is usually not predictable, since batteries may have reached a low state or since the current load on the integrated circuitry may change. This is another problem that can not be handled by conventional
25 approaches.

It is thus an objective of the present invention to provide a method for reliably monitoring the level of a supply voltage, to provide a monitor for reliably monitoring the level of a supply voltage, and to provide integrated circuits based thereon.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An apparatus in accordance with the present invention is claimed in

claim 1.

Various advantageous embodiments are claimed in claims 2 through 10.

A method in accordance with the present invention is claimed in claim

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Various advantageous methods are claimed in claims 11, 12 and 13.

An integrated circuit in accordance with the present invention is claimed
in claim 14.

Immediate benefits of this invention are improved reliability, flexibility,
and competitiveness.

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It is an advantage of the power supply level monitor presented herein that it
can be employed as monitor and level detector in all kinds of integrated circuits.

The present invention avoids the problems of conventional systems using
an internal reference voltage for comparison with the supply voltage.

Other advantages of the present invention are addressed in connection with
15 the detailed embodiments.

Brief description of the drawings

For a more complete description of the present invention and for further objects and advantages thereof, reference is made to the following description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

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FIG. 1A is a schematic block diagram of a first apparatus, according to the present invention;

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FIG. 1B is a schematic block diagram of the POR_1 unit of the first apparatus;

FIG. 1C is a schematic block diagram of the POR_2 unit of the first apparatus;

FIG. 2A is a schematic block diagram of a second apparatus, according to the present invention;

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FIG. 2B is a schematic block diagram of the POR_1 unit of the second apparatus;

FIG. 2C is a schematic block diagram of the POR_2 unit of the second apparatus;

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FIG. 3 is a schematic block diagram of another POR_1 unit, according to the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a schematic graph used to describe the function of a POR_1 unit, according to the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a schematic graph used to describe the function of a POR_2 unit, according to the present invention.

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DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is based on the following principle. An apparatus serving as monitor is provided that generates a signal (nporst) measuring the supply voltage (VDDA) and deciding whether or not this supply voltage has reached a secure level before starting a (digital) application within an integrated circuit.

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The monitor according to the present invention is very flexible. In some

embodiment, its delay after a reset event can be programmed.

The generation of a signal (nporst) is fundamental in many systems. The signal nporst is for example important for systems where no external reset signal can be generated. The task is to monitor the power supply level with a stable reference voltage, which is usually identified by a bandgap voltage of a transistor. In the integrated circuit field this system can be fundamental.

The following problems are faced:

- can one be confident about the start-up behavior of the reference voltage (e.g., the bandgap voltage) until it is stable?
- 10 - If the bandgap rise time should be too long (or unpredictable) for a certain application, what happens in such a situation?

The present invention provides a solution and an architecture based thereon that is designed to overcome these uncertainties.

In Fig. 1A a schematic block diagram of a POR circuit 10, according to the present invention, is given. The POR circuit 10 generates a logic signal (nporst) indicating that a supply voltage (VDDA) has reached a stable level. This logic signal nporst is generated after a trigger signal nporst was received. The POR circuit 10 comprises a first unit 11 (POR_1) for comparing an internal reference voltage (vref) with a voltage (Vtrl) that is a fraction of the supply voltage (VDDA) in order to issue a first logic signal (out_res) at an output 14 as soon as the voltage (Vtrl) reaches the reference voltage (vref). A second unit 12 (POR_2) is provided which applies a delay in order to issue a second logic signal (out_delay) that is delayed by a delay time. A logic unit 13 is employed for combining the first logic signal (out_res) and the second logic signal (out_delay) in order to provide the logic signal (nporst). When this logic signal (nporst) turns logic "1", the supply voltage VDDA is deemed to be stable.

The logic unit 13 may comprise a two-port AND gate, for example.

The delay introduced by the unit POR_2 may be programmable, as illustrated in Fig. 1A. This can be done by applying a sequence of n-bits to the programmable input 18 (Sel<n:0>). As indicated in Fig. 1A, the unit 11 may be connected to the unit 12 via an enabling line 17, that allows the unit 12 to be enabled by a signal provided by the unit 11. This enabling line 17 as well as the programmable delay are optional features.

After having described the basic principle of the present invention, details of the units POR_1 and POR_2 are addressed in connection with Fig. 1B and Fig. 1C, respectively.

The POR_1 unit 11 comprises a voltage divider 11.1 and a comparator 11.2, as depicted in Fig. 1B. A fundamental signal that this unit 11 needs is a voltage reference like a bandgap reference. This voltage reference v_{ref} is fed to the negative input (INN) 11.4 of the comparator 11.2. The voltage divider 11.1 provides an input_plus output signal at an output 11.3. The input_plus voltage may be a sub-voltage of VDDA, for example. The voltage divider 11.1 may be realized using resistors, MOS or CMOS devices, capacitors or other circuits. Well suited is a resistor divider comprising a tunable resistor. The voltage input_plus is a fraction of VDDA, i.e., $input_plus < VDDA$. In the present embodiment, the voltage input_plus is a fixed voltage in the range between 0V and VDDA. When the voltage input_plus at the connection line 11.3 reaches the level of the voltage reference v_{ref} , the signal out_res at the output 14 becomes a logic "1".

The POR_2 unit 12 comprises a delay unit 12.1, as depicted in Fig. 1C. Preferably, the delay time can be programmed by applying an n-bit word Sel<n:0> to the select input 18. In a less complex embodiment, the delay time may be fixed. When being enabled via the enable line 17, the POR_2 unit 12 issues a delayed signal out_delay at the output 15.

The delay unit 12.1 should be designed to provide a reasonable delay on its output (out_delay).

In Fig. 2A, a schematic block diagram of another POR circuit 20, according to the present invention, is given. The POR circuit 20 comprises two POR units 21 and 22 (POR_1 and POR_2) and a logic unit 23 that is needed to combine the two digital outputs 24, 25 (out_res and out_delay) of POR_1 and POR_2. The POR circuit 20 combines the following two logic signals out_res and out_delay: out_res is derived from a comparison between a bandgap voltage (v_{ref}) and a divider voltage (input_plus in the present embodiment); out_delay is derived from a comparison between a divider voltage (v_{sel}) and a delayed voltage (delay_sig) generated by a fixed-delay block 22.1. The delayed voltage (delay_sig) is an analog signal. The delayed voltage (delay_sig) rises much slower than the voltage v_{sel} due to the delay introduced

by the fixed-delay unit 22.1. The two logic signals out_res and out_delay are combined together by the logic unit 23 which in turn generates the nporst signal at an output 26. When this logic signal nporst turns logic "1", the supply voltage VDDA is deemed to be stable. The nporst signal brings the information regarding whether or not the VDDA
5 voltage has reached a secure level allowing the applications within the integrated circuit to be started.

The POR_1 unit 21 of Fig. 2B comprises logic elements that are designed in order to be able to compare a sub-voltage of VDDA (referred to as input_plus) with a reference voltage vref. The POR_1 unit 21 comprises a voltage
10 divider 21.1 and a comparator 21.2. The voltage divider 21.1 may be realized using resistors, MOS or CMOS devices, capacitors or other circuits. Well suited is a resistor divider comprising a tunable resistor. The reference voltage vref is applied to the negative input (INN) 21.4 of the comparator 21.2 of the POR_1 unit 21. The reference voltage input_plus is applied to the positive input (INP) of the comparator 21.2. The
15 reference voltage input_plus is a fraction of VDDA. Input_plus may be equal to vref. In the present embodiment, the POR_1 unit 21 issues a logic "1" at the output 24 if the reference voltage input_plus is equal to or larger than the reference voltage vref.

The POR_2 unit 22, as depicted in Fig. 2C, comprises logic elements that are designed in order to be able to apply a delay. It comprises a fixed-delay block 22.1
20 and a comparator 22.2. The delay is programmable by applying some bits Sel<n:0> to a select input 21.5 of the POR_1 unit 21. By changing the bits applied to this input 21.5, the level of the voltage Vsel at the output 28 of the voltage divider 21.1 is adjusted. The fixed-delay block 22.1 takes the supply voltage VDDA as an input signal and delays this input signal by a fixed delay. As a result, a delayed output signal delay_sig is provided
25 at the output 22.3. An example of such a delayed output signal is depicted next to the output line 22.3. The delayed signal may be a signal that rises steadily until it reaches a stable level. The delayed output signal delay_sig is applied to the positive input (INP) of the comparator 22.2 and the voltage Vsel is applied to the negative input (INN) of the comparator 22.2. In the present embodiment, the POR_2 unit 22 issues a logic "1" at the
30 output 25 after the delay, i.e., when the delayed output signal delay_sig crosses (exceeds) the level of the voltage Vsel. Details are addressed in connection with Fig. 5 to be discussed later.

The fixed-delay unit 22.1 should be designed to provide a reasonable delay on its output (delay_sig). The delay_sig starts from 0 V and preferably rises up to the level of VDDA. The total delay applied to the nporst is defined by the fixed-delay unit 22.1 and the Vsel level chosen via the bit-word at the select input 21.5. Preferably, the delay time is only effective after the supply voltage VDDA was switched on or after a reset event.

Only when both logic signals out_res and out_delay are logic "1", the supply voltage VDDA is deemed to have reached a stable state and the signal nporst at output 26 becomes a true logic "1". The signal nporst is much more reliable than the conventional signal nporst.

The POR_1 unit 21 may have an enable output 27 being connected to an input of the POR_2 unit 22.

Yet another POR_1 unit 31 is depicted in Fig. 3. The POR_1 unit 31 comprises a voltage divider 31.1, a switch 31.6, and a comparator 31.2, as depicted in Fig. 3. A fundamental signal that this unit 31 needs is a voltage reference vref like a bandgap reference for instance. This voltage reference vref is fed to the negative input (INN) 31.4 of the comparator 31.2. The voltage divider 31.1 provides two output signals Vtrl and Vsel at the outputs 31.8 and 31.9. Both voltages Vtrl and Vsel are fractions of the VDDA voltage (also referred to as sub-voltages of VDDA). The signal nporst is applied to an input 31.7 of the switch 31.6. The signal nporst is a signal that is fed from the output 26 to the switch 31.6, for instance. When the signal nporst is logic "1" (typically after a reset event), the switch 31.6 is switched to the state denoted by a 1 and the voltage Vtrl is connected to the positive input (INP) 31.3 of the comparator 31.2. If the signal nporst is logic "0", the switch 31.6 is switched to the state denoted by a 0 and the voltage Vsel is connected to the positive input (INP) 31.3 of the comparator 31.2. The switch 31.6 enables the circuit 31 to use two different voltage levels (trip levels) to be compared with the reference voltage vref at input 31.4. The voltage Vtrl is used after a reset event (i.e., when the signal nporst is logic "1"). In this case the voltage Vtrl is about to rise as the voltage VDDA rises, since Vtrl is a fraction of VDDA. When Vtrl reaches vref, the signal out_res becomes logic "1". The voltage Vsel may be used in case of a power down event (i.e., when the signal nporst is logic "0"). In this case the voltage Vsel is about to decrease as the voltage VDDA decreases, since Vsel is a

fraction of VDDA. When Vsel drops below vref, the signal out_res becomes logic "0" and circuits in the integrated circuit have to stall operations.

In an embodiment where the POR_1 unit 31 is employed together with a POR_2 unit, according to the present invention, the POR_2 unit rules the switching of the nporst signal, since the delayed signal out_delay becomes logic "1" after the signal out_res. When the supply voltage VDDA decreases, e.g., during a power down event, the POR_1 unit 31 rules the switching of the signal nporst.

According to the present invention, a method is provided for generating the logic signal nporst for usage in an integrated circuit. The logic signal nporst indicates that the supply voltage (VDDA) has reached a stable level. The method comprises the steps:

- providing a reference voltage (vref),
- comparing a sub-voltage (input_plus) of the supply voltage (VDDA) with the reference voltage (vref) in order to provide a first logic output signal (out_res) when the sub-voltage (input_plus) reaches the reference voltage (vref),
- providing a second logic output signal (out_delay) that is delayed with respect to the supply voltage (VDDA),
- combining the first logic output signal (out_res) and the second logic output signal (out_delay) to switch the logic signal (nporst) from one state to another state if the first logic output signal (out_res) and the second logic output signal (out_delay) have the same logic value, and
- starting an application within the integrated circuit.

In a preferred embodiment of the method, the logic signal (nporst) becomes a logic "1" if the first logic output signal (out_res) and the second logic output signal (out_delay) both represent a logic "1". In another preferred embodiment, the delay for providing the second logic output signal (out_delay) is programmable.

As illustrated in Fig. 3, an enable signal may be applied to the comparator 31.2, via an enable line 37. The same enable signal may also be applied to the POR_2 unit.

According to the present invention, the units POR_1 and POR_2 generate two independent logic signals out_res and out_delay, as described above in

connection with Figs. 1A-1C, Figs. 2A-2C, and Fig. 3. Both logic signals out_res and out_delay may be generated using a hysteresis. The POR_1 hysteresis is fundamental while the POR_2 hysteresis can be avoided. The POR_1 hysteresis should be designed to avoid possible unwanted glitches on the signal out_res.

5 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the delay unit may comprise a self-biasing current generator which charges a capacitance with a current of a few nA. Such a delay unit may provide a delay of a few milliseconds. Preferably, the delay time is between 1ms and 10ms. Instead of a delay unit comprising a self-biasing current, a simple RC-delay unit may be employed.

10 According to the present invention, the POR circuit 10 or 20 can be designed in a manner that allows the whole circuit 10 or 20 to be disabled by applying an enable signal to the unit POR_1, thus allowing a power-down mode. If the nporst signal generation is disabled, the nporst signal has to be fixed to the same digital level as it is when VDDA is ready and a reset is generated. This is a feature that is not
15 necessary to make the inventive circuit 10 or 20 working, but it is an add-on feature that can be realized when a power-down mode is desired. In other words, the power-down mode is optional.

 The supply voltage VDDA typically is a positive voltage. This voltage may be in the range between 1 Volts and 10 Volts. Preferably, the voltage VDDA is
20 between 1.8 and 6 Volts. The nodes denoted by vss can either be connected to ground, or these nodes may be connected to a negative voltage -VDDA (double supply). The voltage VDDA may for example be +3V and the voltage vss may be -3V. The bandgap voltage vref may be 0.9V, for example. The voltage Vtrl may be 1V, for example.

 Preferably, a comparator 22.2 is employed in the POR_2 unit 22 having a
25 comparator hysteresis of about 30mV. The comparators 11.2 and 21.2, as employed in the POR_1 units 11 or 21 may have a comparator hysteresis of about 0V.

 An integrated circuit according to the present invention may comprise a POR circuit as described in connection with Fig.1A through 3. It further comprises circuitry that requires a certain stability of the supply voltage (VDDA) before initiating
30 operation.

 The integrated circuit may further comprise dedicated circuitry generating a trigger signal (nporst) after a reset event. This can be done using a

conventional approach.

In FIG. 4 a schematic graph is depicted. The operation of a POR_1 unit, according to

the present invention, is now described with reference to this Figure.

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schematic graph, it can be derived that initially the reference voltage v_{ref} rises more

slowly than the sub-voltage V_{trl} . That is, right after a reset event, the supply voltage and thus the sub-voltage V_{trl} may rise more quickly. Between 0.9ms and
10 1.5ms this would lead to a logic signal out_res being logic "1". Since the reference voltage v_{ref} exceeds the sub-voltage V_{trl} after about 1.8ms, the logic signal out_res would suddenly become logic "0". After about 1.8ms, the logic signal out_res becomes a logic "1" again, despite the fact that the sub-voltage V_{trl} is still not stable. Integrates circuits in a convention chip would have started operation after about 1.5ms, which is
15 way too early in the example depicted.

In FIG. 5 a schematic graph is depicted. The operation of a POR_2 unit, according to

the present invention, is now described with reference to this Figure.

After a certain period of time (e.g., about 1.8ms), the delayed signal ($delay_sig$) starts to
20 rise. The level of V_{sel} is adjusted (e.g., by means of programming) to a level of about 1.2V. The delayed signal ($delay_sig$) reaches the V_{sel} signal after about 8ms. Now the output signal of the POR_2 unit becomes logic "1" and as a consequence the signal $nporst$ turns "1". Due to the delay of about 8ms, any uncertainties as addressed in connection with Fig. 4 are ironed out. The delay can be adjusted by shifting the level of
25 the voltage V_{sel} up or down, as indicated by the arrow 50. When shifting the level of the voltage V_{sel} , the point in time where the delayed signal ($delay_sig$) reaches V_{sel} is moved, as indicated by the arrow 51.

The present invention can be used in all systems that need an internal reset generation procedure. The invention is well suited for CMOS circuits.

30 It is appreciated that various features of the invention which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention

which are, for brevity, described in the context of a single embodiment may also be provided separately or in any suitable sub combination.

In the drawings and specification there has been set forth preferred embodiments of the invention and, although specific terms are used, the description thus
5 given uses terminology in a generic and descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation.